

City receives landfill extension Council set to consider deal

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Council is set to consider deal with private waste company today

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The staff of the Texas Water Commission has granted San Antonio a temporary extension of a permit to operate Nelson Gardens landfill.

Wednesday's action came on the eve of a City Council meeting where members will consider contracting with a private waste company to haul the city's trash.

On the landfill issue, the extension of the Nelson Gardens permit was granted by the commission staff, said Jesus Garza, executive director of the commission in Austin.

With the extension, workers can add another 10-foot layer of garbage on top of the existing landfill. Garza estimated that would give the city landfill space through June 1 or longer if the city begins an aggressive composting and recycling program.

The news dribbled out at City Hall as three solid-waste companies mounted a blitz on the eve of a vote scheduled by City Council to set up a new, privately operated landfill.

Some council members speculated the temporary permit approval might scrap the discussion for a contract with a private landfill, but others were eager to make a decision and end the longstanding debate.

Nelson Gardens, on the Southwest Side, was to have lasted through 1998, but it is instead scheduled to close in November.

As an interim measure, the city had applied for a permit to raise the height of Nelson Gardens by 200 feet.

When the permit was not issued, negotiations for landfill space began with private companies.

Officials with Waste Management Inc., which has been talking with the city for six months and was considered the front-runner for the contract until last week, say they can guarantee the lowest rates and enough space for 50 years, if necessary.

"It's an outstanding offer for the city," Charles F. "Mickey" Flood, vice president and regional manager of Waste Management, said in a meeting with the San Antonio Express-News Editorial Board.

Flood said his offer to the city expires Thursday because his costs to take over Nelson Gardens and open Covell Gardens next door have increased by \$500,000.

Shelby Lowe, district manager for Browning-Ferris Industries, cautioned the city not to "jump immediately into a long-term agreement."

Although the city asked for proposals for 10 and 20 years of landfill service, Browning-Ferris submitted bids for three, five and 10 years.

A third company, Texas Disposal Systems of Austin, urged the city not to give all its landfill business to a private company.

Texas Disposal wants to use the city's transfer station on Starcrest Drive near International Airport as a pickup point for all or part of San Antonio's trash to be taken to its landfill in southeast Travis County, a distance of 64 miles, according to company President Bob Gregory.

Staff Writer Jim Wood contributed to this story.

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